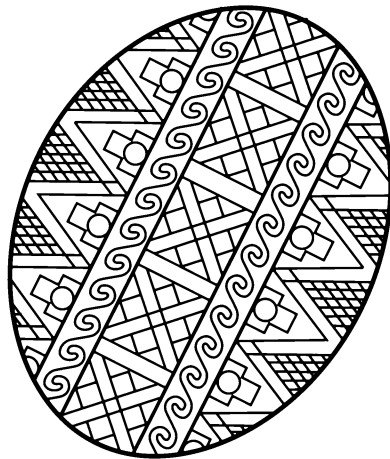
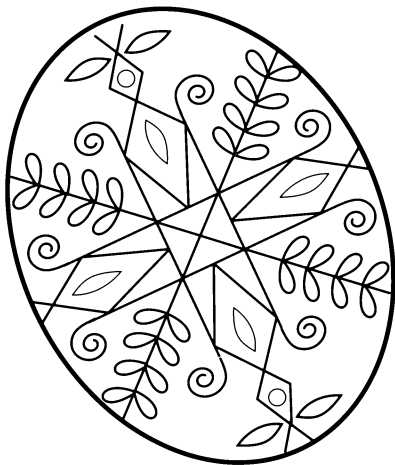


# The Ukrainian Pysanka



## About Pysanky

A **pysanka** (Ukrainian: писанка, plural: *pysanky*) is a Ukrainian Easter egg, decorated with traditional Ukrainian folk designs using a wax-resist (batik) method. The word *pysanka* comes from the verb *pysaty*, "to write", as the designs are not painted on, but written with beeswax.

Many other eastern European ethnic groups decorate eggs using wax resist for Easter. These include the Belarusians (пісанка, *pisanka*), Bulgarians (писано яйце, *pisano yaytse*), Croats (*pisanica*), Czechs (*kraslice*), Hungarians (*hímestojás*), Lithuanians (*margutis*), Poles (*pisanka*), Romanians (*ouă vopsite, incondeiate* or *impistrite*), Serbs (*pisanica*), Slovaks (*kraslica*), Slovenes (*pisanica, pirhi* or *remenke*) and Sorbs (*jejka pisać*). Each of these groups has its own characteristic designs, motifs and colors; the technology may be similar, but the Easter eggs produced are quite distinct.

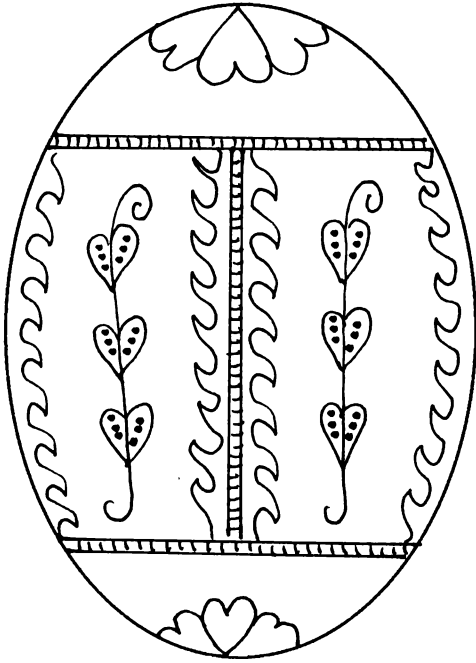
Each village in each region of Ukraine had its own special rituals, and its own symbols, meanings and secret formulas for dyeing eggs. These customs were preserved faithfully and passed down from mother to daughter through generations. The custom of decorating pysanky was observed with greatest care, and a pysanka, after receiving the Easter blessing, was held to have great powers as a magical talisman.

Pysanky were traditionally made during the last week of Lent by the women of the family. During the middle of the Lenten season, women began putting aside eggs, those that were most perfectly shaped and smooth, and ideally, the first laid eggs of young hens. There had to be a rooster, as only fertilized eggs could be used. (If non-fertile eggs were used, there would be no fertility in the home.)

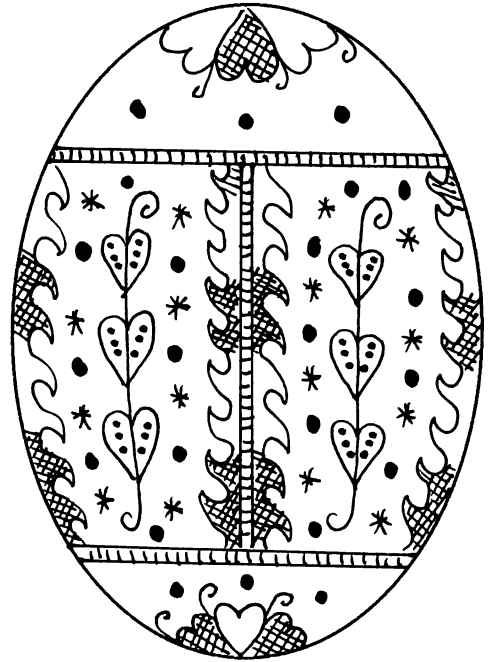
The dyes were prepared from dried plants, roots, bark, berries and insects (cochineal). A writing tool/stylus, known as a *pysachok, pysak, pysal'tse*, or *kystka*, depending on region, was prepared from a stick and a bit of sheet metal. Boiled eggs were not used, as pysanky were generally written on raw or, less commonly, baked eggs (*pecharky*). The pysanky were created at night, when the children were asleep. The women in the family gathered together, said the appropriate prayers, and went to work. It was done in secret—the patterns and color combinations were handed down from mother to daughter and carefully guarded.

Pysanky continue to be made in modern times; while many traditional aspects have been preserved, new technologies are in evidence. Aniline dyes have largely replaced natural dyes. Styluses are now made with modern materials, and an electric version is available. Designs have changed, with intricate and original ones supplementing the beautiful traditional patterns. And the pysanka has gone from being a seasonal object of Ukrainian folk art and magic to an object of art known and enjoyed the world round.

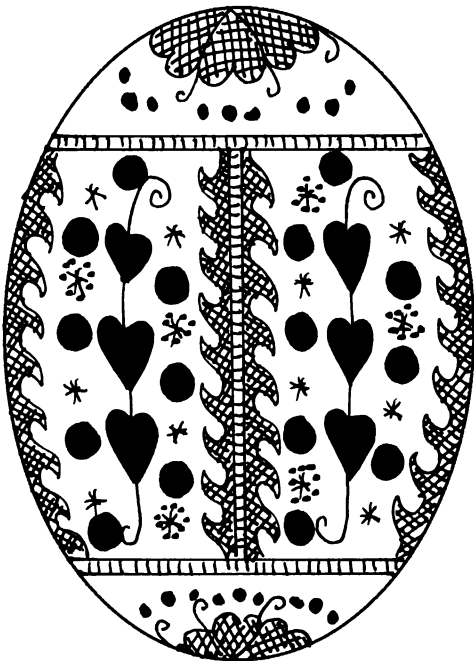
# Hutsul "Hearts"



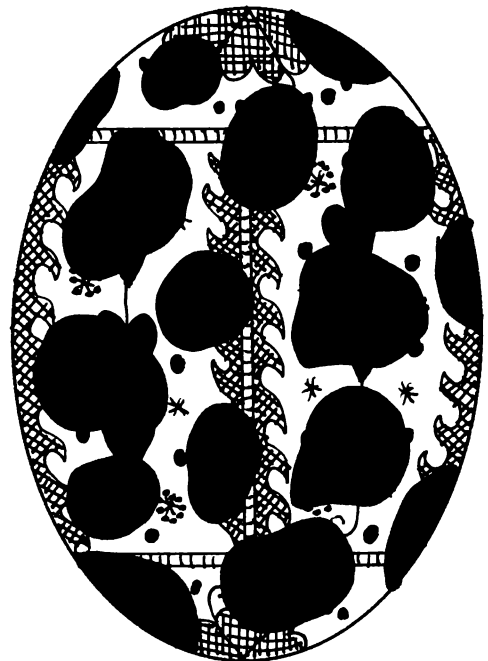
White



Yellow  
Green ●

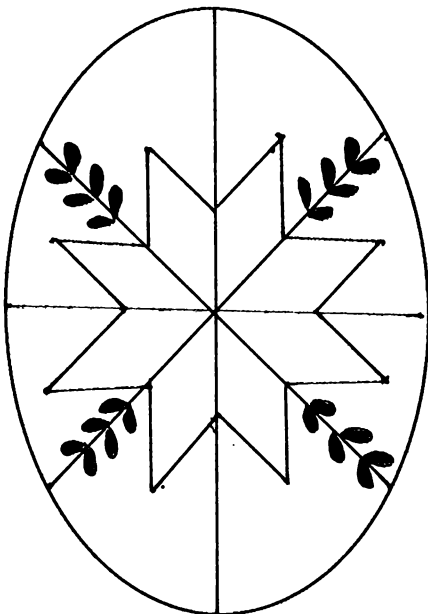


Orange

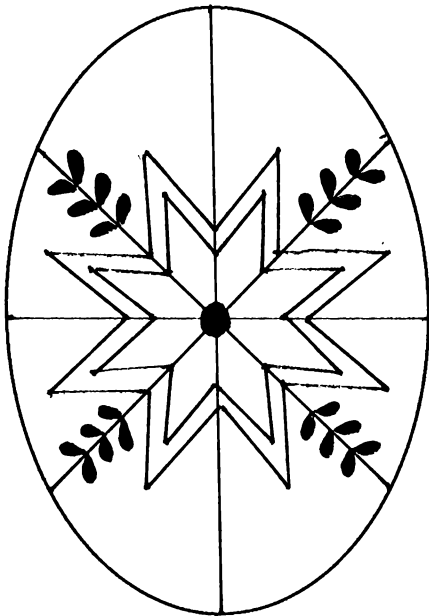


Red to Black

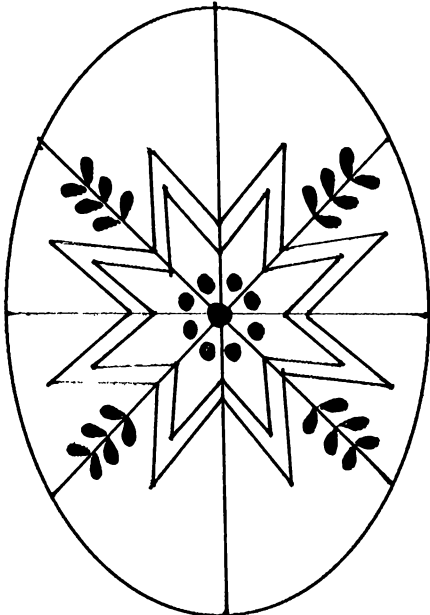
# Star/Ruzha



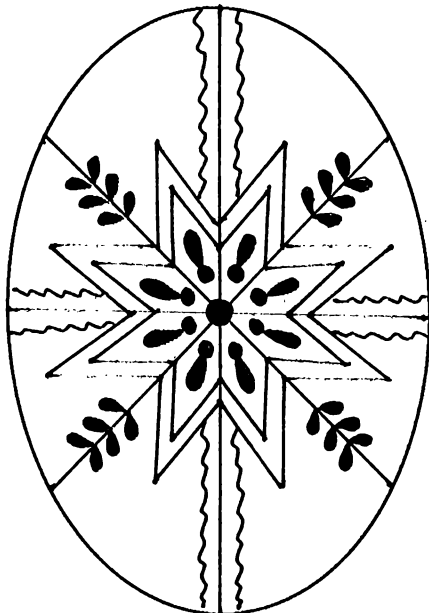
White



Yellow



Green



Orange

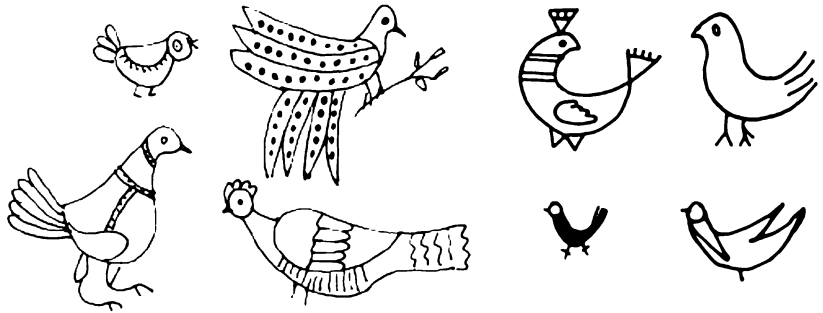


Red -> Black

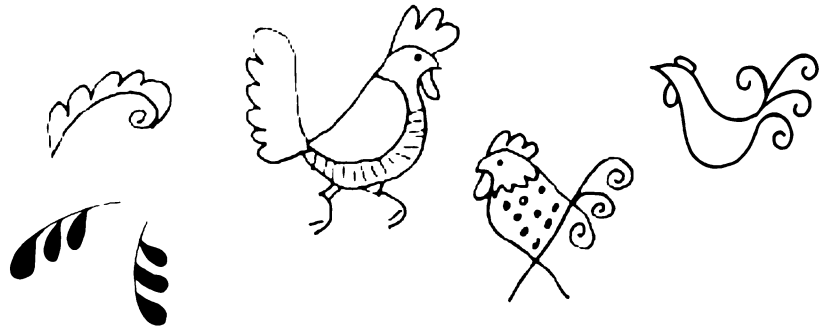
# Symbolism

## Animal Symbols

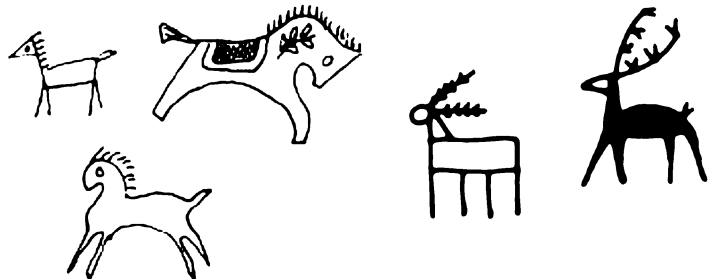
Birds: harbingers of spring  
renewal of life and nature



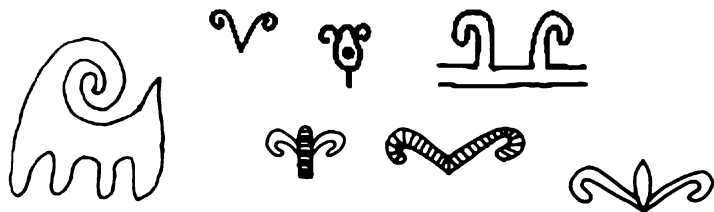
Rooster, Rooster's comb: fertility



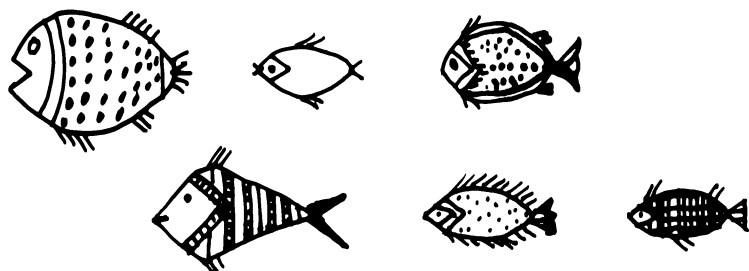
Horse, Deer: sun symbols / Dazhboh  
prosperity, good health



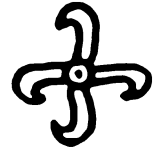
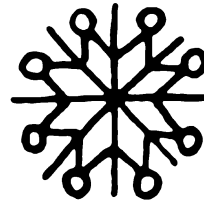
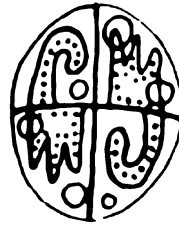
Ram's horns: perseverance



Fish: Jesus Christ



Spider, Spider web: good luck



Wolves' teeth: loyalty

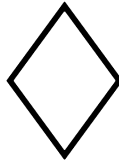


## Geometric Symbols

Triangle: natural trinity: heaven, earth, people



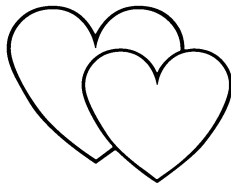
Diamonds: fields



Curls: protection, defense



Heart: love

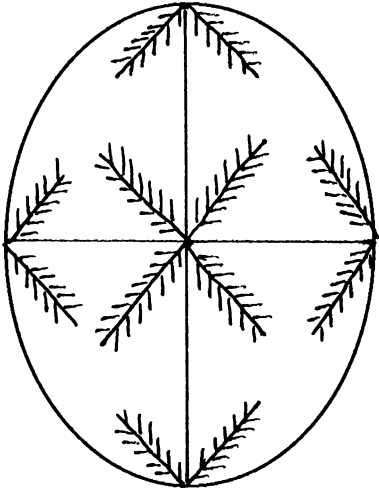


## Plant symbols

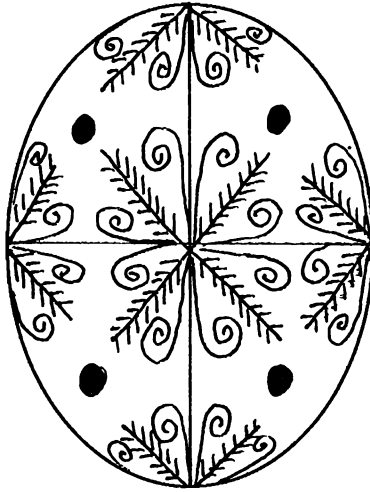
Pine, horsetail: eternal youth, good health



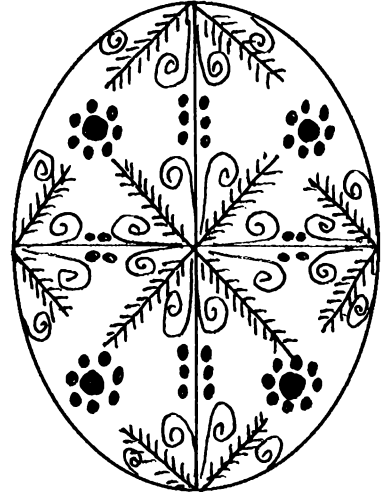
# Three Simple Patterns



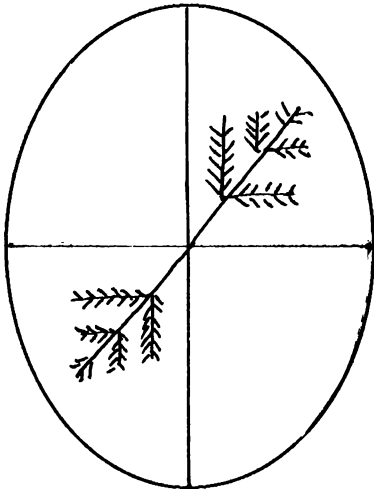
White



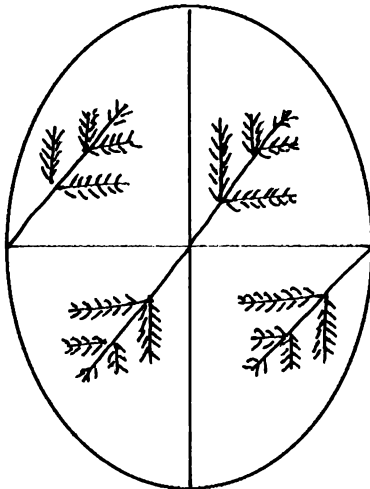
Yellow



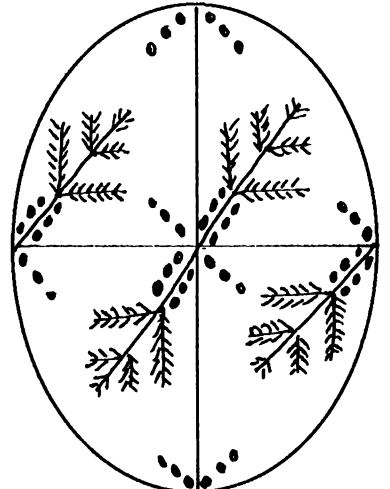
Orange -> Red



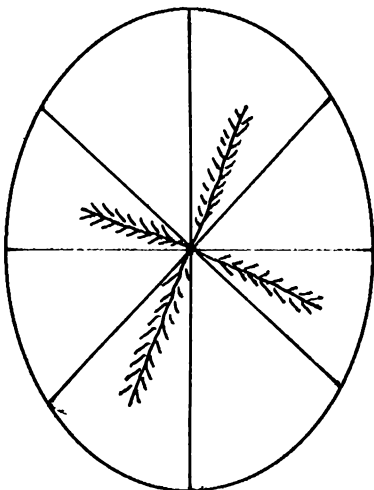
White



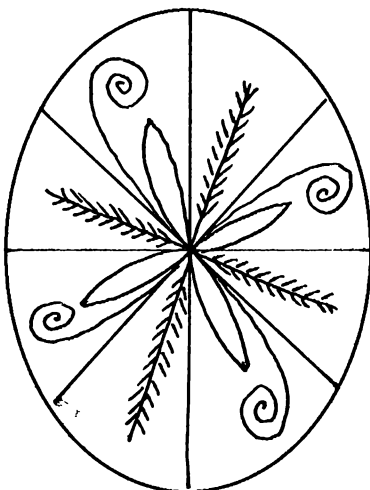
Yellow



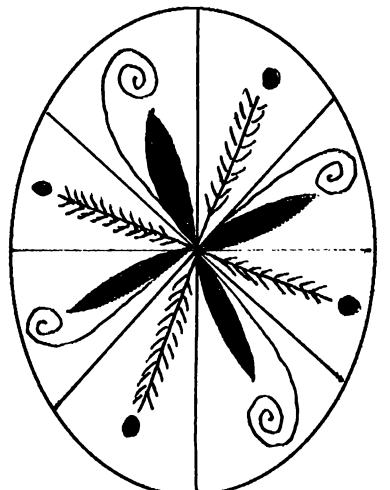
Orange -> Red



White



Yellow



Red -> Black

# Writing Pysanky

## What materials do I need?

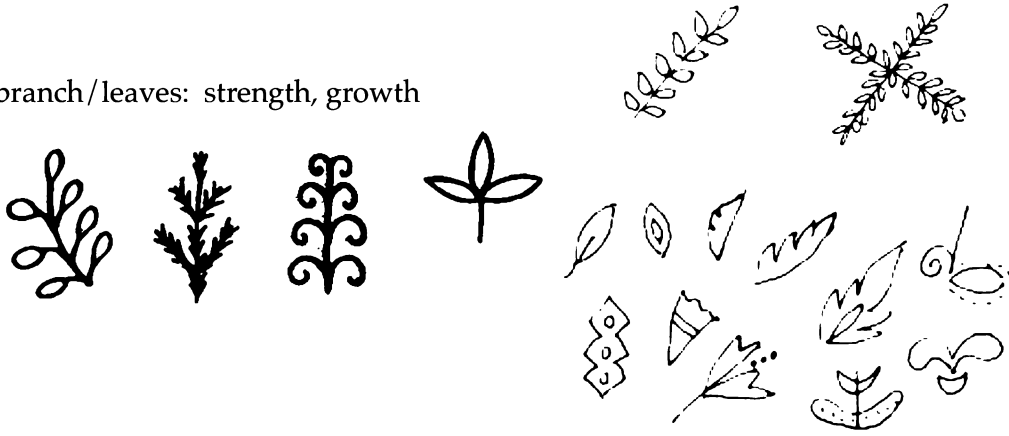
1. Clean eggs at room temperature, without cracks or blemishes
2. Stylus / kistka
3. Beeswax
4. Egg dyes (aniline or natural)
5. Candle (in a holder)
6. Paper towels
7. Vinegar
8. Pencil
9. Clean Hands!!!

## How do I make a pysanka?

1. Wash your hands very well
2. Using the pencil, draw the main lines of your design; do not use the eraser!
3. Prepare your stylus and write on the egg with wax
  - a. heat the stylus (metal part only) in the flame (slowly count from 1 to 8 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8)
  - b. scoop up some beeswax in the large end of the stylus
  - c. heat the tip of the stylus in the flame (count 1-2-3)
  - d. write on the egg with wax until the wax stops flowing
  - e. repeat steps "c" and "d" until you run out of wax
  - f. start again with step "a"
4. Draw in, with wax, all the elements of the design that you wish to remain **white**
5. Put the egg in the vinegar water mix (~1 T vinegar to 1 cup water) for 3-5 minutes
6. Put the egg in the first dye (usually **yellow**) for 3-5 minutes
7. Remove the egg from the dye and pat it dry gently with a paper towel
8. Draw in, with wax, all the elements of the design that you wish to remain **yellow**
9. Repeat the dye–dry–write process, beginning with the lightest colors and ending with the darkest colors. The usual order is:  
  
white → vinegar rinse → yellow → light green → orange →  
bright red → final color (black, dark red, dark blue, brown, etc.)
10. Remove the wax: hold the egg next to the flame (NOT over it) until the wax begins to melt (it will look like water). Wipe off the melted wax with a paper towel. Keep repeating until all the wax has been removed



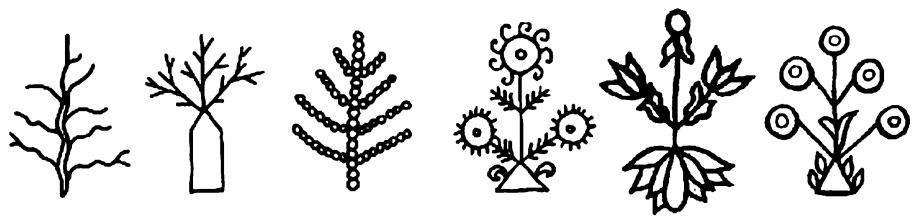
Tree/branch/leaves: strength, growth



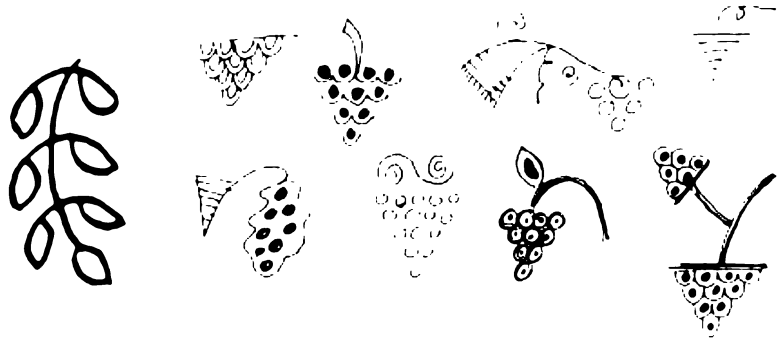
Oak (leaves, acorns): health, long life, the god Perun



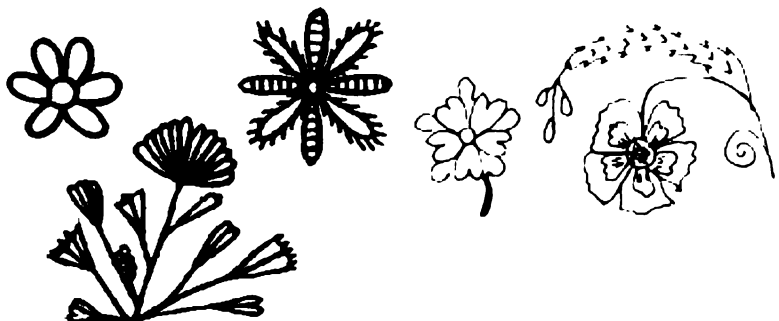
"Vazon" (tree of life): plant fertility



Grapes: Holy communion, good harvest



Flowers: love, wisdom

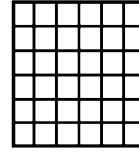
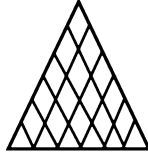


## Household Symbols

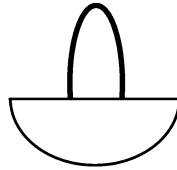
Ladder: prayer



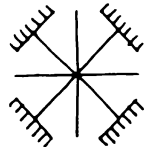
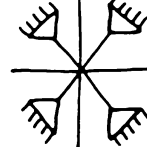
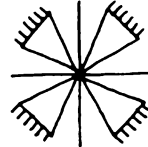
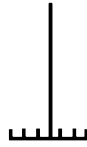
Sieve (resheto): plowed fields



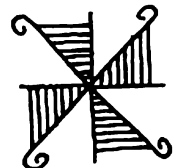
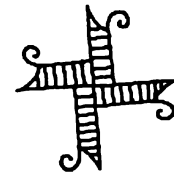
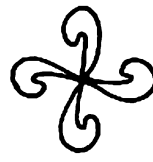
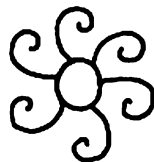
Basket: motherhood, knowledge



Rakes, combs: rain, water



Windmills: Svaroh, movement of the sun across the sky

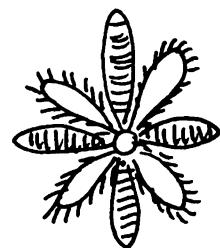
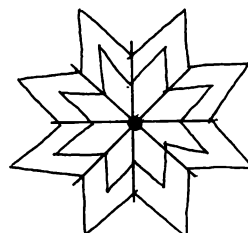
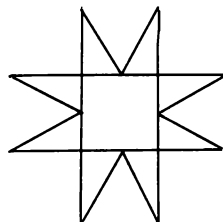


Saw: fire, life-giving heat

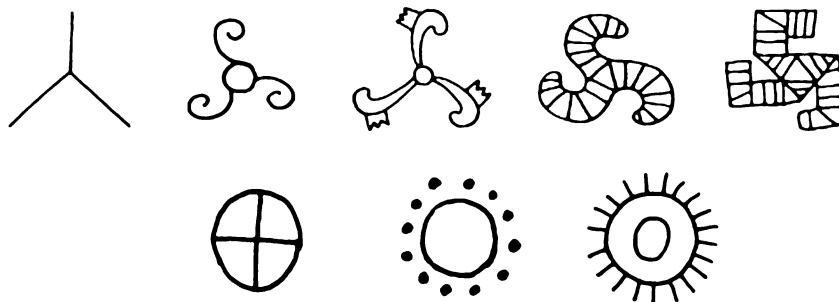


## Religious Symbols

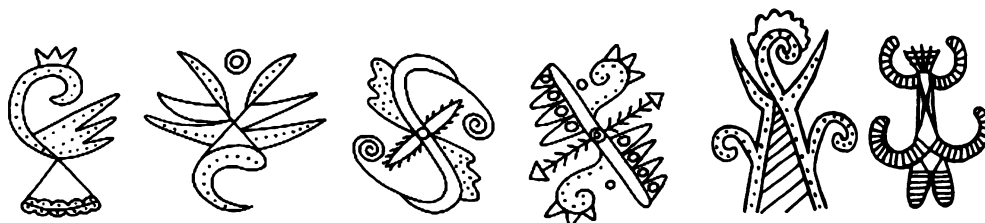
Star / Ruzha : sun (Dazhboh)



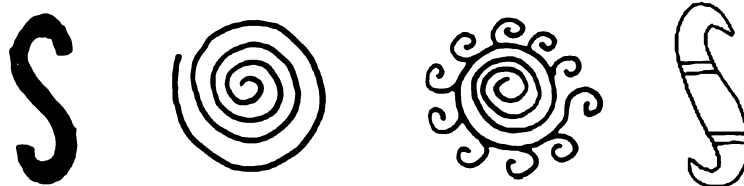
Sun: life, God (Dazhboh)



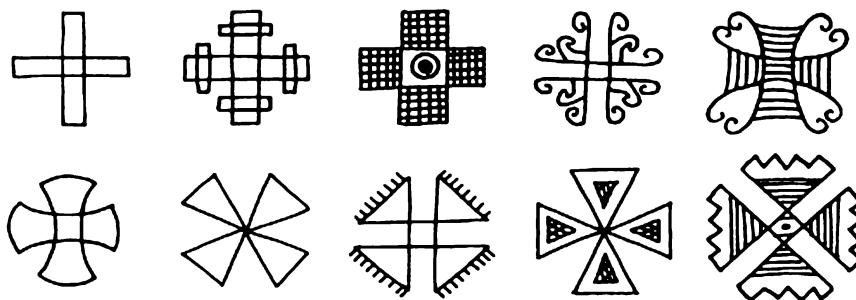
Berehynia  
(Great Goddess)



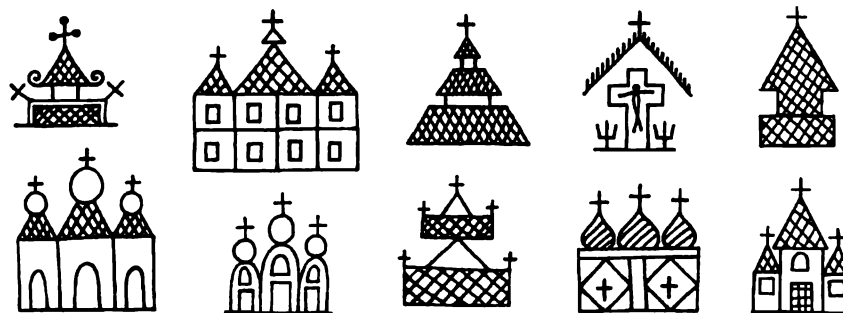
Serpent/Zmiya  
(Water God)



Cross: Sun symbol;  
Svaroh, Christ



Churches



Meander: eternity



This booklet prepared by Luba Petrusha, © 2008-2018. It may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes. For more information about pysanky and pysankarstvo, please go to **[www.pysanky.info](http://www.pysanky.info)**

Supplies may be purchased online through  
Ukrainian Gift Shop <http://www.ukrainiangiftshop.com/>  
Polish Art Center <http://www.polartcenter.com/>  
Wax Art Supply <http://www.waxartsupply.com/>  
Ukrainian EggCessories <https://ukrainianeggcessories.com/>